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NSC BRIEFING

20 December 1954

BACKGROUND--PHAN HUY QUAT

I. Phan Huy Quat, age 53, is the leading figure in semi-clandestine, Nationalist and anti-Communist Dai Viet party, the base of which has been in Tonkin.

A. He combines respect for Vietnamese tradition with drive and modern outlook; he is noted parasitologist by profession and has had commercial experience.

B. His authentic nationalism has not blinded him to the necessity for gradualism and compromise, nor prevented him from rejecting the Viet Minh and throwing in his lot with the feeble Bao Dai government of 1949.

C. His political advancement would have been more rapid but for French opposition to Tokinese influence in the Saigon government.

1. French defended this position on various grounds, but real reason was their fear of nationalists of Quat's caliber.

D. As minister of national defense in 1953 he proved himself a dynamic and competent administrator, although constantly at odds with General Hinh.

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E. Currently, Quat is quietly campaigning for high office--either defense minister or the premiership.

1. Once in office, he would almost certainly prove more efficient than Diem, would probably meet less French opposition.
2. Certain Cochinchina groups, including sects, are firmly opposed to Quat because a strong central government would cost them some of their autonomy.